

Rich Mountain Revisited

By Dallas B. Shaffer

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Federal forces quickly crossed the Ohio River to occupy a large area of the Trans-Allegheny section of Virginia, a section included in the present state of West Virginia. Of the engagements in this initial Civil War campaign, not one exceeded in military or political significance the battle at Rich Mountain on July 11, 1861. This subject is reintroduced because the battle figured prominently in national Civil War developments, and because of its significance both in an experiment in reconstruction at Wheeling and in the movement to establish the present State of West Virginia.

On June 15, 1861, Robert Seldon Garnett, the forty-one year old Adjutant General to General Robert E. Lee, arrived in the little hamlet of Huttonsville, Randolph County. Lee had assigned him to the formidable task of reorganizing Confederate forces in that area, a force of some eight hundred men commanded by Colonel George A. Porterfield. Porterfield had retreated to Huttonsville after his defeat at Philippi by Colonel Benjamin F. Kelley's First (West) Virginia, supported by Federal forces from the Department of the Ohio. The engagement at Philippi had set the stage for Federal seizure of northwestern Virginia.¹

The advance of the Federals caused justifiable concern at the Confederate capital. Lee was distressed by the Federal seizure of Grafton, the junction of the strategic Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and a subsidiary, the Northwest Virginian—lines which connected the eastern part of the United States with Parkersburg and Wheeling and provided essential transportation facilities between Washington and St. Louis. Moreover, Grafton was the logical point from which the Federals might mount an offensive through Elkins, Beverly, Huttonsville, and Monterey, into the Valley of Virginia. Such a movement, aside from threatening the Virginia Central Railroad and the valuable crops in the Valley, might trap Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston at Harpers Ferry between this movement and another force under General Robert Patterson near Harpers Ferry.

Political, as well as military, considerations prompted Lee to assign his Adjutant-General to the task of restoring Confederate control over the Trans-Allegheny counties.² The policy of the Lincoln administration was to capitalize upon the pro-Union sentiment in the western counties in order to establish Federal control over the western part of seceded Virginia. This involved encouraging the

¹ *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, Vol. II, 1861. *Civil War as Official Records*.
² For Garnett's background, see D. S. Foxman, *Lee's Lieutenant*, (3), New York, 1961, p. 28. George W. Callan, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the United States Army*, (New York, 1862), II, 28.

establishment of a loyal state government at Wheeling. In addition to aiding the establishment of the Restored Government of Virginia, the Lincoln administration took several steps to establish military control of the area: the Department of the Ohio, including Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio, was extended to include most of western Virginia, and arms and ammunition had been provided to arm pro-Union military units there.

General Garnett decided to place his forces at strategic and defensible points on the Staunton and Parkersburg Turnpike. This recently constructed turnpike divided at Beverly—the Parkersburg route extended westward across Rich Mountain, the Wheeling branch followed for some distance the Tygart Valley River and extended through Philippi. Garnett located the larger contingent of his force, some 3,500 men, at Laurel Hill a few miles north of Beverly where the road extended over a low ridge near the river. Since this turnpike provided the only practical approach from that area into the Valley, Garnett described his positions at Rich Mountain and Laurel Hill as commanding the “gates to the northwestern country.”³

Garnett placed Colonel Jonathan M. Heck in command of the regiment which was to establish a fortified position at Rich Mountain. Early in the morning of June 16, Heck arrived at the western base of Rich Mountain with his ten companies of infantry, one of cavalry, and one of artillery. He promptly put his men to work upon a camp named in honor of General Garnett. Jed Hotchkiss, of the Confederate Topographical Engineers, arrived some days later to survey the area and draft a map, a project interrupted by the arrival of the Federals on July 9.⁴

Camp Garnett was located on a spur near the western base of Rich Mountain. Fortifications, extending some one-third of a mile, flanked both sides of the turnpike. The Confederates felled trees and removed brush for some 150 yards in front of the breastwork of logs. This cleared area exposed a possible frontal attack upon Camp Garnett to the fire of the Confederate riflemen and artillery. The four artillery pieces were placed to maximize their effect; one piece was placed at either flank and two were located near the center of the line. Local people further convinced the Confederates of the strength of their position by assuring them that there were no avenues of approach by which the Federals could execute an effective flanking movement.⁵ The position at Rich Mountain was strengthened further with the arrival of troops from Laurel Hill. Having received reinforcements of Virginia and Georgia

³ *Official Records*, I, II, 236ff.

⁴ Lieutenant Orlando Poe used the draft prepared by Hotchkiss to produce the map of the Rich Mountain campaign now located in the *Atlas to the Official Records*, Map 2, Plate 1. Foxman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, I, 28. *Official Records*, I, LI, pt. 1, 16.

⁵ C. A. Evans, ed., *Confederate Military History*, (12 v., Atlanta, 1899), II, 19. George B. McClellan, *Report on the Organization and Campaign of the Army of the Potomac*, (New York, 1864), 28. *Official Records*, I, LI, pt. 1, 14; I, II, 260ff. The *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, July 17, 1861.

units, Garnett sent Colonel John Pegram with his Twentieth Virginia to bring the total strength at Camp Garnett to some 1,300 men. Pegram, whose Confederate Army commission outranked the commission of Heck in the Virginia militia, assumed command of the Confederates at Camp Garnett.⁶

Garnett's troop deployment was designed to serve offensive, as well as defensive, purposes. As he looked to the defenses at Rich Mountain and Laurel Hill, Garnett advised Lee that he intended to deprive the Federals of the use of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. He planned to move a force to Evansville, a point on the Northwestern Turnpike from which he might threaten the railroad center at Grafton, twelve miles distant, or the Cheat River Bridge, some fourteen miles from Evansville.⁷

Should the Confederate movement to Evansville fail to draw the Federals from Grafton and the Cheat Bridge, Garnett planned to destroy the railroad at Independence, only five miles from Evansville. In that case Garnett hoped to attack the Federals at Cheat Bridge and destroy the railroad before reinforcements could be brought up. However, Garnett felt that his forces would have to be augmented by enlistment of western Virginians before he could undertake such an offensive. But he found that the western Virginians were not sympathetic to the Confederate cause. Not only were the people there "against us", Garnett reported to Lee, they kept the Federals informed of the Confederate movements and dispositions.⁸ Moreover, before Garnett could sufficiently prepare for the offensive, General George B. McClellan outmaneuvered and beat him to the punch.

On June 23, 1861, as Garnett was preoccupied with erecting fortifications at Laurel Hill and Rich Mountain, General McClellan arrived at Grafton to coordinate the attack upon the Confederates. His original plan had called for a movement through the Kanawha Valley against Richmond. But prominent persons in the Charleston area advised him against moving Federal troops into the Kanawha Valley and the Lincoln administration rejected this proposed campaign. With the buildup of Confederate forces in the Randolph County area, McClellan set aside his plan to move into the Kanawha Valley and, with prompting by Lincoln's cabinet, moved instead against Garnett.⁹

⁶ R. U. Johnson and C. C. Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, (4v., New York, 1864-1867), I, 122. A recent account of the engagement estimated Garnett's strength at 4,300 men. W. W. Hensley, *General George B. McClellan, Shield of the Union*, (Baton Rouge, La., 1975), 25. However, on July 3 Garnett reported a total of 4,565 men. Two days later Colonel Scott worked with the Forty-fourth Virginia at Beverly, which probably brought the total Confederate strength to about 5,000 men. See reports of Scott and Garnett, *Official Records*, I, II, 274, 283.

⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 283, 284.
⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 283, 284.
⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 283, 284. McClellan's brigade included the Sixth, Seventh, and Ninth Indiana Regiments, the Fourteenth Ohio, part of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Ohio, the Sixth Ohio, one artillery battery, and two companies of the First (West) Virginia, Brigadier Hill at Grafton commanded the Fifteenth, Sixteenth, Eighteenth, Twentieth, and Twenty-second Ohio regiments. McClellan, *Report*, 22-24. *Official Records*, I, II, 214.

McClellan soon concluded that Rich Mountain was, as one of his subordinates later described it to the Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War, the key to Confederate defenses in Trans-Allegheny Virginia. The fall of Camp Garnett would threaten Confederate positions from Harpers Ferry to Tennessee. Never before had military dispositions been better arranged to demonstrate, under certain circumstances, the validity of the "domino theory" of defense.

With the fall of Camp Garnett, Confederate defenses would crumble in Randolph County. McClellan's movement to Beverly would make the Confederate position at Laurel Hill untenable, severing as it would Garnett's line of supply to Staunton and trapping him between McClellan and another Federal force in front of Laurel Hill. In turn, the collapse of Garnett's command would, as both Confederates and Federals were aware, endanger Johnston's position at Harpers Ferry should McClellan elect to move over the Staunton and Parkersburg Turnpike into the Valley. Moreover, Garnett's defeat would jeopardize the Confederate position in the Kanawha Valley. McClellan might choose to move southward to trap the Confederates in the Kanawha Valley, commanded by General Henry A. Wise from his Charleston headquarters. Wise faced a Union general, Jacob D. Cox. Or, as the Confederates feared, McClellan might move to attack either the Virginia Central or the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad.

McClellan, on July 9, moved his headquarters to Roaring Creek, about two miles west of Camp Garnett. He ordered Brigadier General Thomas A. Morris to Laurel Hill, assigning him the task of keeping Garnett in place by convincing the Confederates that Laurel Hill would bear the brunt of the coming Federal assault.¹⁰ With three brigades, including troops from present West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, stationed at Roaring Creek, McClellan assigned about one-fourth of his command of some twenty thousand men to protect the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad from Confederate raids.¹¹

Despite his actual numerical superiority over the Confederates, McClellan was greatly concerned about the outcome of the battle. His troops were three-month enlistees, basically civilian troops. He was apparently deceived by a report of two Confederate prisoners that Camp Garnett contained some eight or nine thousand troops. His most trusted adviser estimated that a frontal assault, which McClellan felt to be a necessity, would take a heavy toll of lives. A frontal assault, nevertheless, offered probable success.¹²

Nor was McClellan encouraged by the conduct of some of his subordinates. Shortly after midnight before the battle, a regimental

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ McClellan stationed other units at Chest River Bridge, Weston, Glenville, and other northern locations. McClellan, *Report*, 28, 33-36.

¹² *Official Records*, 1, 13, pt. 1, 13.

commander at Roaring Creek delivered an alarming speech to his troops. The Confederates at Camp Garnett, according to the speaker, were ten-thousand strong and strongly fortified with forty rifled cannon. "They will cut us to pieces," the defeatist predicted. "Marching to attack such an enemy, so entrenched and so armed, is marching to a butcher shop rather than to a battle."¹³ As McClellan later admitted, the "dreadful responsibility" of the welfare of his civilian army did weigh heavily upon the young officer.¹⁴

McClellan was not to execute the planned frontal assault. Eighteen-year-old David Hart, who lived in a farmhouse at the top of Rich Mountain, appeared to bring about a change in Federal tactics and perhaps to prevent the sacrifice of countless lives. The Hart farm had been taken by the Confederates and used as a dispensary and commissary. Hart appeared in camp briefly, volunteered some information about the topography of the area, and then vanished. When he returned to camp, he was detained in the tent of a brigade commander, General William S. Rosecrans. Rosecrans left his task of organizing his brigade to spearhead the frontal assault and returned to his tent to question Hart.¹⁵ Hart informed Rosecrans of a route of which a sizable force could be taken around the left flank of the Confederates to a point at the top of Rich Mountain, from which a usable dirt road extended the one and one-half mile to the Confederate position at the Hart farm.¹⁶

Rosecrans, perhaps not too anxious to make the frontal assault upon Camp Garnett, was convinced that such a flanking movement was feasible. From ten o'clock until midnight on July 10, Rosecrans discussed this movement with McClellan and his staff. McClellan considered the sketch Rosecrans had drawn of the proposed movement, questioned the Hart lad, and heard the arguments of his staff. Acting Inspector General R. B. Marcy, McClellan's father-in-law, immediately approved Rosecrans' plan. Yet, McClellan was not easily persuaded.¹⁷

Rosecrans told McClellan that the flanking movement would force Pegram to detach a large element of troops to protect his rearguard, thereby making Camp Garnett weaker for McClellan's frontal attack. Said Rosecrans:

¹³ John Beatty, *Memoirs of a Volunteer*, edited by Harvey S. Ford, (New York, 1946), 25-26, 34. For the uncertainties felt by the Confederates, see William T. Price, *On to Grant*, (Martinsburg, W. Va., 1901).

¹⁴ G. B. McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story: The War for the Union*, (New York, 1867), 60.

¹⁵ USMA graduate Rosecrans was involved in oil and coal business near Charleston during the Civil War with headquarters in Cincinnati. Whitelaw Reid, *Ohio in the War: Her Generals, Her Generals, and Her Soldiers*, (2d., New York, 1868), I, 211-217. *Official Records*, I, II, pt. 1, 457. See also Rosecrans' testimony, *Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War*, (2d., Washington, 1863-1866), III, pt. 2. Cited hereafter as RCM.

¹⁶ *Official Records*, I, II, 214-15. *Whetting Intelligence*, July 18, 1861.

¹⁷ McClellan, *Report*, 20.

Now, General, if you will allow me to take my brigade, I will take this guide [Hart] and, by a night's march, surprise the enemy at the gap, get possession of it, and thus hold his only line of retreat. You can then take him on the front. If he gives way, we shall have him; if he fights obstinately, I will leave a portion of the force at the gap, and with the remainder fall upon his rear.¹⁸

Rosecrans told McClellan that his troops would reach the summit of Rich Mountain by ten o'clock the next morning. McClellan was finally convinced.

McClellan ordered Rosecrans to move out with his brigade at four a.m., to take the Confederate position at the Hart farm, and then to move down the mountain to attack Camp Garnett. He was to dispatch a messenger back to McClellan hourly to report his progress. McClellan assured Rosecrans that the frontal assault would take place the moment he attacked the rearguard of the Confederates at Camp Garnett.¹⁹

At midnight Rosecrans rushed to his brigade to explain his plan to the regimental commanders. The troops were aroused at three a.m., provided one day's rations, and assembled for the long march. Rosecrans tried to prevent the Confederates at Camp Garnett from detecting his movement. He left some troops to hold reveille and assembled his column as quietly as possible. Yet lights appeared momentarily in one regiment and the Confederates at Camp Garnett observed the activities in the Federal camp. With one cavalry unit added by McClellan to bring the total strength of Rosecrans' forces to 1,917 men, the brigade was placed in the following order of march:²⁰

The Eighth Indiana Colonel William P. Benton	242 men
The Tenth Indiana Colonel Mahlon D. Hanson	425 men
The Thirteenth Indiana Colonel J. C. Sullivan	650 men
The Nineteenth Ohio Colonel Samuel Beatty	525 men
Burdsal's Ohio Dragoons (cavalry)	75 men

The column left camp at dawn, moved eastward on the Staunton and Parkersburg Turnpike for some time, then turned southward into the forest. As they followed the course of Roaring Creek, the troops were exposed to a heavy rain which continued from six until eleven o'clock that morning. Fearing Confederate detection, Rosecrans decided to move his column farther south than originally ordered by McClellan. The march was arduous. Rosecrans led his troops eastward up a ravine and along a spur of Rich Mountain until he arrived at the crest. At times he followed only a path leading through thickets which limited vision to some fifty feet, at times he followed a bed of a mountain stream, and occasionally he relied solely upon a compass for direction. He halted at eleven

¹⁸ JCCW, 3, Jacob D. Cox, *Military Reminiscences of the Civil War*, (New York, 1900), 24.

¹⁹ McClellan, *Report*, 29.

²⁰ *Official Records*, I, 3, 215.

o'clock at the brink of a deep valley. Opposite his column was the last ascent leading to the dirt road and the Hart farm. While the troops rested, Rosecrans took a subordinate and young Hart to the crest of Rich Mountain to study the terrain. Hart then left the column.²¹

As Rosecrans began moving his column silently along the dirt road leading to the Hart farm at two o'clock that afternoon, he was unaware that the Confederates had learned of his movement and had reinforced the position at the Hart farm. During the night Colonel Pegram had detached two companies of the Twentieth Virginia to reinforce the position at the Hart farm. That morning a Confederate picket wounded and captured a cavalry sergeant whom McClellan had sent to check on the progress of Rosecrans' column. Pegram learned that the flanking movement was indeed in progress, but he could not persuade the sergeant to indicate the flank from which the attack was coming. Pegram ordered additional men to the Hart farm and advised the Confederates there of a possible Federal attack.²²

Confederate troop dispositions and fortifications were completed at the Hart farm only minutes before Rosecrans attacked to initiate the first major land battle of the Civil War. The one artillery piece engaged in the battle had been hastily placed in position some two hours before the Federals appeared. Only three hundred ten Confederates defended the Hart farm fortifications, a crude breastwork of logs set up along the road on the north side of the pike opposite the small two-story frame Hart farmhouse.²³

A native of New Jersey and former officer in the United States Army, Captain Julius A. De Lagnel commanded the small Confederate detachment at the Hart farm. De Lagnel had orders from Pegram to request reinforcements if necessary, but he was to hold his position at all costs. De Lagnel's conduct in the coming engagement was to earn him the reputation as the Confederate hero of Rich Mountain.²⁴

While Rosecrans led his column toward the Hart farm, McClellan was waiting impatiently to launch the frontal assault on Camp Garnett. But he was encountering difficulties. By eleven o'clock that morning his forces were in position, but his artillery placements had not been completed. McClellan remained with the advance pickets awaiting Rosecrans' assault upon the Confederate stronghold at Camp Garnett.²⁵

The engagement at the Hart farm was brief, beginning about three o'clock and concluding some two hours later. The clash

²¹ Official Records, I, 11, pt. 1, 10.
²² Ibid., 11, 11.
²³ Ibid., 11, 12, 13, 14.
²⁴ Ibid., 11, 15.

²⁵ Official Records, I, 11, pt. 1, 11.
 Federal Series, Army of the Potomac, [M], I, 545.
 Historical Register and Dictionary of the

began when the Confederates opened fire upon the Federal column as it advanced to the crest of a hill overlooking the Hart farm. When the advance section of the Tenth Indiana arrived at that point, they received fire from the Buckingham Institute Guards of the Twentieth and the Rockbridge Guards of the Twenty-fifth Virginia.²⁶

The Confederate fire brought temporary chaos to the Federal line. The inexperienced Federals were shaken by the firing. Although the Confederate fire was steady and rather rapid, the Federals were protected by a thick screen of undergrowth which prevented any degree of accuracy on the part of their opponents. Moreover, the Confederates, directing their fire up the slope, were firing in front of the Federals.²⁷

Rosecrans found that the rough and uneven terrain made difficult the forming of his lines for the assault. He then ordered his men to advance in small groups, to fire, and then to throw themselves to the ground for cover. He ordered Colonel Hanson to deploy four companies of his advance regiment as skirmishers. Hanson brought his regiment to the right wing of the advancing force, his line extending from the road along the crest of the mountain to the brow of the mountain overlooking Tygart Valley. He moved his regiment to within three hundred fifty yards of the Confederate position, and being somewhat in advance of the main body, he ordered his men to halt and take cover. He remained in place for about forty-five minutes awaiting the advance of the main body. Meanwhile, Colonel Lander brought up twenty riflemen to lead the right arm of the attack. Lander placed his men in a protective position among the rocks opposite the Confederate artillery piece and tried to silence it.²⁸

Rosecrans ordered Colonel Sullivan to place his Thirteenth Indiana on the left wing of the lines. Sullivan placed five companies at the forks of a road in the rear of the main column with instructions to prevent a Confederate flanking movement. Although it suffered no casualties, this detachment of the Thirteenth Indiana was a principal target of the Confederate artillery.²⁹ Sullivan further divided his regiment as the main line prepared to advance. He ordered three companies to make a frontal assault upon the Confederate right. He formed a detachment of Companies E and G to turn the Confederate flank. This detachment encountered a Confederate contingent bringing up an artillery piece from Camp Garnett to reinforce De Lagnel.³⁰

²⁶ Hampden-Sidney College students commanded by Professor John M. P. Atkinson formed one company of the Twentieth Virginia engaged at the Hart farm. H. M. Price and C. T. Allen, "An Account of the Campaign of Rich Mountain in 1861, and the Death of General R. S. Garnett," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, (38v., Richmond, 1867-1910) edited by R. A. Brock, XXVII, 38-48.

²⁷ Staff of Merrill & Co., *The Soldier of Indiana in the War for the Union*, (Indianapolis, 1904), 57.

²⁸ *Official Records*, I, LI, pt. 1, 9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Meanwhile, the Confederates thought they had repulsed the attack. Their artillery maintained a steady volume of spherical shot, firing at a rate of some four rounds a minute until the Federal column wavered and appeared to be withdrawing. The Confederates expressed their relief by loud shouts, but within twenty minutes Rosecrans resumed the attack. The Confederates were forced to move their artillery piece back to a small log stable, behind which they had placed their horses and ammunition.³¹

The main Federal assault was not well coordinated. The Eighth Indiana, which Rosecrans had ordered from reserve to the right of the line, took a position at the center. Colonel Benton, taking advantage of the covering fire of Sullivan's regiment, was to assault the Confederate artillery. Rosecrans realized Benton's error but permitted him to remain at the center for the assault.³² Rosecrans placed the Nineteenth Ohio at the center of the line; the seven companies of this regiment were located along a fence running parallel to the Confederate breastworks. At Colonel Beatty's direction, this contingent fired several telling volleys into the Confederate artillery.

Rosecrans was not confident of his troops' performance under fire. He feared they would become unnerved by the prolonged Confederate artillery fire. At four o'clock Rosecrans placed himself at the head of the left wing of Sullivan's regiment and personally led the attack. The Nineteenth Ohio fired a volley into the Confederate lines just as Rosecrans led the charge down the side of the hill toward the Hart farm. A second volley from the Nineteenth shook the Confederate line — whereupon the entire Federal line of three regiments charged the works with a loud shout. The Federals stormed the enemy breastworks and pursued the fleeing Confederates some three hundred yards up the opposite side of the hill.³³

Captain De Lagnel had made a futile attempt to rally his men to resist the Federal assault. But the Federal charge completely overpowered the Confederate line. De Lagnel, after having his horse killed beneath him, helped to load and fire three or four rounds of artillery before he fell with a side wound. He then turned over his command to a subordinate and ordered the retreat.³⁴

Rosecrans called off the pursuit of the Confederates and prepared his troops for a possible Confederate counterattack.

³¹ *Official Records*, I, II, 270.

³² *Soldier of Indiana*, 54.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Official Records*, I, II, 270 De Lagnel escorted the Federals to the home of a Mr.

White who lived two miles south of Beverly and was cared for by a local physician. He was later captured and paroled. McClellan is said to have visited him twice while he was recovering at a Mr. Arnold's home. J. T. Arnold, "The Battle of Rich Mountain," *Kanawha County Society Magazine of History and Biography*, 1926, 31-32.

While he was reforming his command, he learned from a prisoner that another force, located less than a mile west of the Hart farm, was enroute to reinforce De Lagnel.³⁵

The Confederate contingent to whom the prisoner referred had been sent by Colonel Pegram to reinforce De Lagnel. When the battle began, Captain Pierce B. Anderson of the Lee Battery advised Pegram to reinforce De Lagnel with artillery. At four o'clock that afternoon a cavalryman rode into Camp Garnett requesting immediate reinforcements for De Lagnel. Pegram agreed to send Anderson with fifty men and an artillery piece. As Anderson's column approached the Hart farm, they encountered the detachment of the Thirteenth Indiana which was to turn the Confederate right flank. After a brief exchange with the Federals, Anderson's column withdrew and left behind the artillery piece and several wounded men. When he had restored his control over his men, Anderson placed them in a position along the pike to repel the anticipated Federal advance from the Hart farm.³⁶

Learning that the Forty-fourth Virginia was posted nearby and considering the exhausted state of his troops, Rosecrans departed from McClellan's battle plan to bivouac for the night at the Hart farm. He planned to make the attack on Camp Garnett the next morning. He placed the two captured cannon to repel an attack from either the Forty-fourth Virginia or from Camp Garnett. He deployed eight companies of the Tenth Indiana along the road leading to Camp Garnett. Rosecrans provided comfortable quarters and equal attention to both the Federals and the Confederate wounded. While twenty-one Confederates were taken prisoner, the number killed and wounded has not been definitely established. Twelve Federals were killed and forty-nine were wounded in this engagement.³⁷

Despite the rain and the unseasonable coolness of the night of July 11, 1861, the army of Rosecrans was thrilled by their easy success. Throughout the night the Federals responded promptly to the alarm caused by the Confederates as they retreated from Camp Garnett. Rosecrans learned of the evacuation of Camp Garnett from a prisoner who was brought to him before dawn.³⁸

Meanwhile General McClellan had held his troops in assault position for almost three hours waiting for Rosecrans to attack Camp Garnett. When the firing began at the Hart farm, McClellan and his staff moved up to the forward picket line. But McClellan could not bring himself to order the frontal attack. He observed

³⁵ JCCW, I.

³⁶ *Official Records*, I, LI, pt. 1, 11, I, II, 372.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 216. *The New York Times*, July 23, 1861. For estimates of casualties, see Rosecrans' report in *Official Records*, I, II, 217-218; and George E. Moore, "West Virginia and the Civil War 1861-1863," Dissertation, (Ph.D.), West Virginia University, 1937, 116.

³⁸ *Official Records*, I, II, 216-217.

the Confederates at Camp Garnett making speeches which were greeted by loud cheers. The jubilant mood of the Confederates at Camp Garnett and the failure of Rosecrans to attack convinced McClellan that the Confederates had overpowered the Federals at the Hart farm.³⁹

Moreover, McClellan was troubled by a report that his artillery had not been placed in a position to shell Camp Garnett. Lieutenant Poe selected a knoll about five hundred feet from the Confederate left flank, an elevated position which was some sixty feet higher than Camp Garnett. But Poe advised his commanding officer that he would have to cut a road through the thick undergrowth and trees before he could move up the artillery to the knoll. By nightfall the road was completed, but only one battery had been placed in position. The artillery from Camp Garnett briefly bombarded the Federals on the knoll, but the barrage ended when the Confederates concluded that they could not ascertain its effect.⁴⁰

McClellan decided to withdraw his forces to Roaring Creek and to postpone the attack upon Camp Garnett until the following morning. Leaving the Ninth Ohio to guard the artillery piece on the knoll, McClellan called in the advance pickets and moved back to Roaring Creek at dusk on July 11, 1861.⁴¹

As McClellan was placing his units in position to attack and as the artillery was being moved to the knoll to shell Camp Garnett, a cavalryman rode in from the camp to report the Confederate withdrawal. He told McClellan that Rosecrans had dispatched the Nineteenth Ohio, units of the Tenth and Thirteenth Indiana and Burdsal's cavalry to occupy Camp Garnett. This report was verified by Lieutenant Poe. McClellan moved his units out, passed through Camp Garnett, and halted briefly at the Hart farm to speak to the wounded. He then proceeded to occupy Beverly without opposition late in the afternoon. He left Rosecrans' brigade at the Hart farm until the following day when it moved to Beverly.⁴²

The success of Rosecrans had jeopardized the Confederate position at Camp Garnett. After dispatching Captain Anderson to reinforce De Lagnel, Pegram had decided to visit the Hart farm to check on the progress of the battle. Ordering Major Nat Tyler to prepare the Twentieth Virginia to move to aid De Lagnel, Pegram proceeded toward the Hart farm, arriving just as the Confederates were being driven back by the charging Federals. Unable to rally the troops, Pegram returned to Camp Garnett.⁴³

Pegram arrived at Captain Anderson's position between Camp Garnett and the Hart farm just as Tyler's column was being brought

³⁹ Beatty, *Memoirs of a Volunteer*, 27-28. *Official Records*, I, II, 265; I, LI, pt. 1, 13.

⁴⁰ McClellan, *Report*, 50.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, 216-217. *Whispering Intelligence*, July 18, 1861.

⁴³ *Official Records*, I, II, 264.

up. Pegram proposed a night attack upon the Federal forces holding the summit of Rich Mountain, a proposal enthusiastically accepted by his men. Pegram led the men through laurel thickets on the north side of the pike to the top of the mountain where he took a position about a quarter of a mile from Rosecrans' right flank.⁴⁴ But during the march the Confederates became nervous and fired into the last segment of the column. Major Tyler and Captain Anderson then advised Pegram against the night assault. Pegram agreed. Pegram ordered Tyler to lead this column to join either General Garnett or Colonel Scott. By nine o'clock the following morning, Tyler joined Scott at Huttonsville.⁴⁵

Colonel Scott had attempted to come to De Lagnel's aid. During the early morning of July 11, Scott moved his Forty-fourth Virginia Infantry from Beverly to the eastern foot of Rich Mountain. During the afternoon Scott learned from a cavalry officer from the Hart farm area that De Lagnel needed his support. A native of Beverly and a member of the convention which adopted the Ordinance of Secession, John M. Hughes, was sent by Scott to obtain information from De Lagnel regarding his specific needs for reinforcements. Confederate pickets near the Hart farm, however, shot and killed Hughes, mistaking him for a Federal.⁴⁶

Scott moved his regiment up the eastern side of Rich Mountain to a point on the Staunton and Parkersburg Turnpike about one and one half mile from the scene of the battle. Scott sent a second man to contact De Lagnel, but he was captured by the Federals. When the second courier failed to return, Scott concluded that the Federals were in possession of the Hart farm. He then withdrew to Beverly. When he learned of the retreat from Laurel Hill, Scott loaded his wagons with the provisions in Beverly and left the little town near midnight.⁴⁷

Joined by Major Tyler's column at Huttonsville the following morning, Scott continued the retreat across Cheat Mountain to the Greenbrier River. There he met Colonel Edward Johnson with the Twelfth Georgia Infantry enroute to reinforce Garnett. As the ranking officer, Johnson assumed command of the entire force and led the retreat to the top of the Allegheny Mountain, where he met General H. R. Jackson. Jackson in turn assumed command and completed the retreat to Monterey.⁴⁸

Colonel Pegram had in the meantime returned to evacuate Camp Garnett. After an exhausting and hazardous trip, during which he lost his way in the darkness and suffered from a fall from his horse, Pegram arrived in Camp Garnett at eleven o'clock. He

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 260.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁴⁶ *The Wheeling Herald*, July 26, 1861.

⁴⁷ *Original Records*, 27911.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

then called a war council of the field officers and company commanders. The Confederates unanimously agreed that a withdrawal from Camp Garnett was necessary. With some six hundred men, the Confederates were exposed to an attack by Rosecrans who had more than three times their number of troops. McClellan's superior force was also poised to launch a frontal assault. The fall of the position at the Hart farm left Camp Garnett virtually defenseless.⁴⁹

The slightly injured Pegram relinquished command to Colonel Heck. Heck called the pickets in, spiked the cannon to prevent their use by McClellan, and assembled his men for retreat. With Jed Hotchkiss serving as a guide, Captain R. D. Lilley led the forward company of the Twenty-fifth Virginia. Consisting of two companies of the Twentieth and seven of the Twenty-fifth Virginia, this column left Camp Garnett about one o'clock in the morning of July 12. Before the last section of the troops left camp, Pegram decided to resume command. He sent an orderly to pass the word along and to halt the column until Pegram came to the front. The fifty men who were with Lilley and Hotchkiss, however, were not contacted. They marched directly to Beverly to make good their escape. A small group of sick and wounded Confederates were also left at Camp Garnett in charge of a surgeon and a sergeant who were to surrender the camp at daybreak.⁵⁰

Lilley's detachment was unaware that it was separated from the main column until the following morning. Passing near to the Federals at the Hart farm, they arrived at Beverly before noon. When Lilley learned of the pursuing Federals, he acquired provisions and continued the retreat to Huttonsville. From Huttonsville Lilley led his detachment to the top of Cheat Mountain where he began work upon a defensive position. He was joined by portions of other companies fleeing Rich Mountain.⁵¹

At Yaeger, Lilley and his men met Governor John Letcher. Making good his promise of visiting the area to rally western Virginians to the Southern cause, Letcher had left the capital to visit Garnett's command. Letcher at first agreed to a proposal by Hotchkiss that fortifications should be established at the top of Cheat Mountain. However, Letcher later agreed with Lilley that the conditions of the troops made advisable the retreat on to Monterey where they arrived on Sunday, July 14.⁵²

The main body of the troops from Camp Garnett did not fare as well as the detachment under Lilley. Pegram had moved his column across Rich Mountain to a point on the Tygart Valley

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 262.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 261-263.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² For Letcher's attempt to restore Western Virginia to the Confederate cause, see Richard Sevry, "John Letcher and West Virginia," Thesis (M.A.), West Virginia University, 1961.

River about three miles south of Leadsville [Elkins]. Several local people met Pegram to tell him of a Confederate detachment at Leadsville. Pegram left Heck in charge and proceeded to verify the report. When he came within sight of town, Pegram learned that Garnett had withdrawn from Laurel Hill. Pegram then returned to the main column and ordered them to bivouac that night by the Tygart.⁵³

Pegram called a council of war to consider surrender. His troops were exhausted and slightly unnerved by their defeat. He considered an orderly retreat virtually impossible. Only Heck and J. B. Moorman opposed the decision to surrender. Pegram sent to McClellan the following note at midnight:⁵⁴

Headquarters at Mr. Kettle's Farm
House, July 12, 1861

TO: The Commanding Officer of the Northern forces, Beverly, Va.

SIR: Owing to the reduced and almost famished condition of the troops under my command, I am compelled to offer to surrender them to you as prisoners of war. I have only to ask that they receive at your hands such treatment as Northern prisoners have invariably received from the South.

I am, sir, your obedient servant,

JOHN PEGRAM

Lieutenant Colonel, P. A. C. S., Commanding

Accompanied by a small retinue of cavalry, Colonel Thomas M. Key and Major Seth Williams delivered McClellan's reply.

Since the Lincoln administration refused to recognize the Confederacy, McClellan could not address Pegram as an officer of an established government. McClellan returned the following firm but considerate note to Pegram:

JOHN PEGRAM, Esq.,

Styling himself Lieutenant-Colonel, P. A. C. S.

Sir: Your communication dated yesterday proposing to surrender as prisoners of war the force assembled under your command has been delivered to me. As commander of this department, I will receive you, your officers and men, as prisoners of war, but it is not in my power to relieve you or them from any disabilities incurred by taking arms against the United States.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

GEO. B. McCLELLAN

Major-General, U. S. Army, Commanding Department

⁵³ *Official Records*, I, II, 266.

⁵⁴ Pegram in 1863 helped to disgrace Rosecrans and end his military career. Pegram commanded a division at the battle of Chickamauga. Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, 27. III:341146-49. *Cullum, Register*, II, 374.

After addressing this note to Pegram, McClellan ordered his men to load food and provisions in wagons and proceed to deliver them to the surrendering Confederates.⁵⁵

Accepting the terms of surrender offered by McClellan, Pegram proceeded to check the strength of each company of his regiment. He learned that one officer had deserted during the night with some forty men, leaving some thirty-three officers and five hundred sixty enlisted men to surrender to McClellan. At Beverly the Confederates surrendered their weapons and received rations and comfortable quarters under guard. The officers, except Pegram and a former U. S. Army physician, were paroled and given liberty of the town.⁵⁶

The fate of the Confederates at Laurel Hill was hardly more fortunate. When Garnett learned that the Federals held Rich Mountain, he realized that he could not hope to maintain his position at Laurel Hill. By leaving his tents in place and withdrawing silently, Garnett did escape without detection by General Morris. Intending to move over the Staunton and Parkersburg Turnpike before McClellan blocked his escape route by occupying Beverly, Garnett proceeded southward on the pike until he was erroneously informed that the Federals were already in possession of Beverly. Garnett turned northward from the pike, hoping to evade the Federals and move his troops around the northern section of the mountain range to return to Staunton.⁵⁷

His column found passage across branches of the Cheat River difficult, since it was swollen by the recent rain. At Corrick's Ford the wagons were momentarily halted. While the First Georgia and part of the Twenty-third Virginia regiments were trying to retrieve the wagons from the deep waters, Federal troops under Captain Henry W. Benham engaged them in a brief exchange of small weapons fire.⁵⁸ General Garnett returned to the rearguard to supervise the action against Benham. While directing the Confederates in removing the wagons from the ford, Garnett was shot and killed by a sergeant of the Seventh Indiana Regiment. Garnett's column was able to continue to Red House, Maryland, to cross the Allegheny Mountains through Greenland Gap, and evading the Federals under both Generals Morris and Hill, made their way to Monterey, Virginia.⁵⁹

From Beverly General McClellan made good use of the telegraph lines which he had constructed as his armies advanced. McClellan immediately reported the successes of his campaign. The North had been much concerned with his campaign and was elated by

⁵⁵ *Official Records*, I, II, 210, 258ff.

⁵⁶ Pegram refers to Captain Moorman's company which escaped to Monterey. HRCMH 51-54.

⁵⁷ Johnson and Bush, *Battles and Leaders*, I, 133ff.

⁵⁸ *Official Records*, I, II, 219ff, 283ff. Henry W. Benham, *Recollections of the West Virginia Campaign With the "Three Months Troops," May, June, and July, 1861*, (Boston, 1872).

⁵⁹ HRCMH 54-55.

McClellan's seemingly easy victory. To his troops McClellan issued the following Napoleonic-styled congratulatory address, a message which was faithfully reproduced by the Northern press:

Soldiers of the Army of the West:

I am more than satisfied with you. You have annihilated two armies, commanded by educated and experienced soldiers, intrenched in mountain fastnesses fortified at their leisure. . . . You have killed more than two hundred and fifty of the enemy, who has lost all his baggage and equipage. All this has been accomplished with the loss of twenty brave men killed and sixty wounded on your part.⁶⁰

Although McClellan exaggerated the casualties involved in this campaign, his victory was as decisive as it was virtually bloodless. As Allan Nevins concludes, Rich Mountain was certainly the most important battle of the campaign by which McClellan virtually freed the Trans-Allegheny counties of organized bodies of Confederates.⁶¹ And as the leading authority in the history of present West Virginia asserts, it "settled summarily the political destiny of northwest Virginia."⁶²

Testifying later before a Congressional committee, General Rosecrans did not exaggerate in stating that the capture of the gap at Rich Mountain removed the keystone from the Confederate arch of defense.⁶³ By taking the Confederate position at the Hart farm, Rosecrans initiated a chain of events which crushed the Confederates in the Trans-Allegheny counties.

The collapse of Confederate defenses in the Randolph County area not only foiled their plan to destroy the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad at Cheat River, which Lee considered "worth to us an army,"⁶⁴ it jeopardized their position in the Kanawha Valley. General McClellan planned to use a large segment of his force to move through Sutton and Summersville to cut off the retreat of General Wise from Charleston. In such an event, McClellan would trap Wise between his army and that of General Jacob D. Cox.⁶⁵

General Wise retreated from Charleston to a position near Lewisburg. Cox pursued him to Gauley Bridge, the confluence of the New and Gauley Rivers, and established a defensive position. Wise informed General Lee that he had withdrawn "because forces from McClellan may move from Weston to Summersville and cut us off"⁶⁶ The Confederates also feared that McClellan might destroy either the Virginia Central or the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad. Therefore, Lee approved the withdrawal.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ *Official Records*, I, II, 202ff. Captain A. Irwin Harrison, assistant adjutant to Rosecrans, was the grandson of the former President. *Soldier of Indiana*, 44.

⁶¹ Allan Nevins, *The War for the Union: The Improvised War 1861-1862*, (New York, 1959), 225.

⁶² Summers, *Baltimore and Ohio*, 89.

⁶³ J.C.W., 1-2.

⁶⁴ *Official Records*, I, II, 279.

⁶⁵ McClellan, *Own Story*, 51-52.

⁶⁶ *Official Records*, I, II, 1011.

⁶⁷ *New York Times*, July 13, 1861. *Official Records*, I, II, 743ff.

The success of McClellan at Rich Mountain was as alarming to the Confederates as it was elating to the North. Jefferson Davis considered Rich Mountain disastrous.⁶⁸ The news concerning Rich Mountain and the death of Garnett caused in Richmond a near panic. Groups gathered on street corners in the Confederate capital to discuss the bad news until past midnight on July 16. This setback destroyed the hopes of General Beauregard to unite the armies of Johnston and Garnett to reassert Confederate control over the Trans-Allegheny counties.⁶⁹

While the Confederate press tried to minimize the effects of Rich Mountain, inner circles at Richmond felt that the Federal success there would "embolden the enemy to attack us at Manassas, where their suddenly acquired confidence will be snuffed out."⁷⁰ Although the decision had been made on June 29, 1861, to attack the Confederates at Manassas Junction, Rich Mountain did encourage the hasty execution of the plans.⁷¹ In Congress radical Republicans ignored the sage advice of the elderly Winfield Scott and joined Northern editors in promoting the "On to Richmond" clamor to which Rich Mountain had added immeasurably. Those advocating an immediate movement upon the Confederates cited McClellan's success as proof that extensive preparations were unnecessary. The *New York Times*, however, cautioned the people against demanding an attack on Manassas before adequate preparations were made.⁷² When the Federals attacked the Confederates at Manassas Junction on July 18, 1861, McClellan's triumphal entry into the national capital was virtually assured by his Rich Mountain reputation.

After the Federal defeat at Manassas Junction, the North instinctively looked to the hero of Rich Mountain. McClellan had received national attention and acclaim for his successful West Virginia campaign. On July 13 he was notified that the President and his cabinet were "charmed" by his success.⁷³ Representative Thomas M. Edwards of New Hampshire introduced the following resolution which was unanimously adopted by the House:

Resolved: That the thanks of this House be presented to Major General G. B. McClellan, and the officers and soldiers of his command for the series of brilliant and decisive victories . . . achieved . . . on the battlefields of Western Virginia.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, (2v., New York, 1912), I, 338.

⁶⁹ Fissman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, I, 36n, 42-43.

⁷⁰ J. B. Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary at the Confederate State Capital*, (New York, 1935), edited by Howard Swiggett, 32-33. The significance of Rich Mountain is suggested by General Cox who looked upon the Confederate campaign in West (ern) Virginia after First Manassas as an attempt to "regain what they had lost at Rich Mountain." Cox, *Reminiscences*, 72-73.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *The New York Times*, July 18, 1861.

⁷³ *Official Records*, I, II, 204, 908; I, LI, pt. 1, 386-387.

⁷⁴ *Congressional Globe*, 1st Session, Thirty-seventh Congress, 148.

The General Assembly of the Restored Government of Virginia offered similar praises to McClellan.⁷⁵

On July 22, 1861, President Lincoln and his advisers concluded that McClellan was the one man in whom the North had confidence, the one who should be given the task of reorganizing the Federal army shattered by defeat. In the gloomy months following First Manassas, the North relied upon the memory of McClellan's successful campaign. As one Congressman observed, it served to "infuse hope in the public mind and to remove the gloom and despondency."⁷⁶

The political effects of Rich Mountain enhanced its importance in both national and local history. To be sure, the prestige of the Federal Government rested with the outcome of McClellan's campaign. One week before the battle of Rich Mountain, Lincoln himself recognized Governor Pierpont in an address to the first session of the wartime Congress.⁷⁷ Federal control of Western Virginia was essential to the functioning of the Restored Government, which was also recognized by the Thirty-seventh Congress. McClellan, in a successful campaign culminating at Rich Mountain, had faithfully executed his orders from Lincoln's Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, and his Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase.⁷⁸

As McClellan recognized Pierpont, a Marion County businessman elected as chief executive of the Restored Government, and as he made the area safe for the pro-Union government by removing Confederate armies, he also succeeded to some extent in broadening its base of support. Aware as he entered Western Virginia of the importance of winning the people to the Federal cause, McClellan ordered his troops to respect private property and civilians. Moreover, he tried to combat Confederate propaganda warning Western Virginians that the entry of Federal troops would incite a slave insurrection. McClellan issued a proclamation which assured Western Virginians that, not only would the Federal army oppose such an insurrection, it intended to crush "with an iron hand" any attempted revolt.⁷⁹

McClellan also tried to win Confederate sympathizers to a renewed allegiance to the Union. His tactful dealings with the

⁷⁵ *Ordinances and Acts of the Restored Government of Virginia . . . to March 2, 1866.* (Wheeling, 1866).

⁷⁶ James G. Blaine, *Twenty Years in Congress; From Lincoln to Garfield*, (2v., Norwich, Conn., 1884-1886), I, 338.

⁷⁷ Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, (9v., New Brunswick, 1957), IV, 427-428.

⁷⁸ John S. Carlisle to G. B. McClellan, May 30, 1861. The George B. McClellan Papers, The Library of Congress.

⁷⁹ *Official Records*, I, II, 48. G. B. McClellan to B. F. Kelley, May 26, 1861. The McClellan Papers.

Confederates, for which he was severely censured,⁶⁰ and his re-establishing the authority of the Federal Government in Trans-Allegheny Virginia caused many Confederate sympathizers to despair of continuing resistance to the Federal Government.⁶¹

As McClellan established Union control over Trans-Allegheny Virginia to permit the functioning of the Restored Government, and both the President and Congress formally recognized it as the legal state government, Western Virginians seized the opportunity to obtain the required consent to a division of the state. When they met in convention at Wheeling three weeks after Rich Mountain, Western Virginians took the first major step to form the state of West Virginia, a movement which was permitted to proceed to its realization without serious interference from Confederate military units. With little likelihood of serious challenge, then, Douglas S. Freeman could conclude that the formation of the new state was made possible by the Confederate loss of military control over Western Virginia⁶²—a disaster in which the leading act was performed at Rich Mountain.